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Atari Online News, Etc.  
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->From the Editor's Keyboard  
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"Saying it like it is!"

Okay, I know that I sounds like a broken record, but I'm beat!! A long and tiring week, lots of cold and rain, topped off with a night of no sleep because of the rain and lightning. Those two weather bits really freak out my two dogs - one was hiding in our bedroom closet and the other was mercilessly huffing and puffing all night, keeping us awake all night! And then an early and long day at work! I'd probably beg off [again] putting down some words of wisdom again this week, but a barrage of deaths in the entertainment world is prompting me to make some remarks!

First, Ed McMahon. The perfect sidekick for Johnny Carson. Watching The Tonight show was enjoyable, but it made for better entertainment when Ed and Johnny did their bits. And to see McMahon take Carson down a peg every once in awhile was classic.

And, we lost THE Charlie's Angel, Farrah Fawcett! Sure, she wasn't a great actress, but if you grew up when that show aired, like I did, you couldn't help but like Farrah! And, I'm not ashamed to admit that I was one of those proud owners of that "infamous" poster!

Okay, and then we lost Jacko!! Okay, I have to admit, I was never a Michael Jackson fan. As far as I'm concerned, he was a self-made freak of nature. Granted, he had talent. Heck, I even liked a few of his songs throughout his long career. But, he was a freak, a sick one. C'mon, parading around with his pet monkey. Neverland, his personal area of entertainment. His alleged child molestation issues. A sham marriage to Lisa Marie Presley. Another sham marriage and children. And many years of mutilating his face through plastic surgery which personified that freak image. And there's much more! Sure, maybe most of all of this was simply a lot of publicity stunts. Quite possible. I know that when I heard Jackson's name mentioned, the first question that came to mind was "what did he do now?"

Yes, he was a talented singer and dancer. He usually had a great act, if you enjoyed that type of a show. He had a world of fans. But, he's been nothing for years, but a reclusive misfit. Sure, he'd make some semblance of an appearance every once in awhile to keep his fans happy. Too many problems and too many issues - all his own doing.

Okay, so he's gone. It is a sad day for many fans. His death will likely cement his fame for all of eternity. Had he lived for many more years, I believe he would have drifted off into obscurity. But Jacko, you've made it into the pop music history books. Good for you. But, I'm not disappointed that I didn't buy any of your records or videos. Hey, I'm entitled to enjoy who and what I like! The "thrill" is gone.

Until next time...

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!  
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## Bethesda Parent Company Buys Legendary Doom Developer

Well that's that then, the parent company of the guys who make Oblivion and Fallout 3 just bought the folks who make a couple games you've maybe heard of called Doom and Quake. Put less jaw-droppingly, ZeniMax Media - the front company for Bethesda Softworks - just picked up id Software, and all the developer/administrative celebs at both houses seem to be high-fiving the deal with bells on.

Of the transaction, id CEO Todd Hollenshead wrote:

"This was a unique opportunity to team with a smart, sophisticated publisher like Bethesda Softworks where the interests of the studio and the publisher will be fully aligned in the development and marketing of our titles. In addition, we will now have financial and business resources to support the future growth of id Software, a huge advantage which will result in more and even better games for our fans."

Kind of wild, when you think how long both companies have been - for all intents and purposes--independent entities. Bethesda set up shop in 1985 and somehow managed to avoid being assimilated by the publishing borg, while id's done one-off deals with majors like Electronic Arts and Activision but remained autonomous since 1991. They've both witnessed the rise and fall of dozens of others studios - many just as groundbreaking--from Origin (Ultima, Wing Commander) and Black Isle (Fallout, Icewind Dale, Baldur's Gate) to Strategic Simulations, Inc. (Pool of Radiance, Panzer General) and Looking Glass (System Shock, Thief, Terra Nova) to Bullfrog (Populous, Syndicate Wars, Dungeon Keeper) and Westwood Studios (Dune II, Command & Conquer).

ZeniMax's press release goes out of its way to assure that id Software will continue to operate as a separate studio under founder and code wizard John Carmack's direction. "No changes will be made in the operations of id Software in the developer of its games," says the

release, adding "All the principals at id Software have signed long-term employment contracts." Business as usual, in other words.

"This puts id Software in a wonderful position going forward," said John Carmack, explaining that the purchase will allow id Software to nurture its franchises in a single, resource-consolidated space. "We will be bigger and stronger, as we recruit the best talent to help us build the landmark games of the future," he continued, adding "As trite as it may be for me to say that I am extremely pleased and excited about this deal, I am."

Hard to believe, but the presently much-beloved company that long ago made some of the buggiest fantasy role-playing games in the industry (remember Daggerfall?) now owns the company that pretty much defined said industry with green-glowing BFGs and auto-catapulting rocket launchers from the 1990s on.

### Activision May Stop Supporting Sony PS3

Activision Blizzard Chief Executive Bobby Kotick said in a published report on Friday it may stop making video games for Sony's PlayStation 3, the No. 3 console in the United States, due to high costs and poor sales.

In an interview with the Times of London, Kotick complained that the PS3's \$399 price tag is too high, and said the game publisher might stop supporting the console.

Kotick was quoted as saying: "I'm getting concerned about Sony; the PlayStation 3 is losing a bit of momentum and they don't make it easy for me to support the platform. It's expensive to develop for the console, and the Wii and the Xbox are just selling better."

Kotick said in 2010 and 2011, Activision "might want to consider if we support the console - and the PSP too."

Activision, the largest U.S. game publisher, did not respond to requests seeking additional comment.

The most popular console, Nintendo's Wii, costs \$250, while the cheapest version of Microsoft's Xbox goes for \$200.

Roughly 290,000 units of the Wii were sold in the United States in May, according to research group NPD, versus 175,000 for the Xbox and 131,000 for the PS3.

Complaints from game publishers about the cost of consoles are nothing new, but Kotick's statements were particularly pointed.

"It's a little shot across the bow .... Was there a message there to Sony? Quite possibly," said MKM Partners analysts Eric Handler.

"It is more difficult to develop for the PS3 and it costs a little more .... The PS3 install base isn't what they thought it would be and the machine is too expensive."

In an emailed statement, Sony Computer Entertainment America said "we enjoy healthy business relationships with and greatly value our

publishing partners and are working closely with them to deliver the best entertainment experience."

#### GTA: Chinatown Wars Will Be Adapted To Sony PSP

Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars is coming to Sony's PlayStation Portable. Rockstar Games said the Nintendo DS game will be adapted to the PSP platform and be available this fall.

New story missions, enhanced lighting and animation, and upscale widescreen graphics are promised for the PSP version. It will be developed by the Rockstar Leeds studio.

The violent game for the Nintendo DS has been a slow seller, with only 163,000 copies purchased by mid-May. The game released in March has received good reviews.

The PSP version will be available on UMD for older disc-based PSPs and on the PlayStation Network.

#### Game Developers Gunning For Girl Power

Known for making adrenaline-pumping action games for young men, video game companies now are getting in touch with their feminine side.

Electronic Arts , THQ , Ubisoft Entertainment and Walt Disney are among the game publishers that have made a big commitment to games for girls.

Why? Because it's a lucrative and relatively untapped market.

EA and Ubisoft in particular already have found success in making games for elementary school to tween girls.

In the U.S. alone, video games for girls ages 2 to 12 generated sales of \$1.4 billion for the 12-month period through April, according to sales tracker NPD Group. The girls segment represented about 7% of the total video game market for the period.

"Girls have stopped thinking that gaming is geeky and are starting to think games are cool," said Chip Lange, vice president and general manager of Electronic Arts' EA Hasbro division.

Video games for girls today fall into two main categories, says Anita Frazier, an analyst with NPD. There are "pet/nurturing games" like EA's "Littlest Pet Shop" and Ubisoft's "Petz," and there are "fashion/style type games" like Ubisoft's "Imagine" franchise.

"These are two classic play patterns for girls of this age," Frazier said. "I'm hoping with greater experience with this market that the publishers are able to branch out and find other themes of games to appeal to girls."

Game executives agree.

"We're introducing them to the world of video games," said Tony Key, senior vice president of sales and marketing at Ubisoft. "Where they go from here is up for grabs. I would love to see them become lifelong gamers."

Ubisoft is adding a third girls brand this fall with Style Lab. It's targeting 8- to 12-year-old girls, known as "tweens" because they are between childhood and adolescence. Style Lab games are being developed for Nintendo's DSi handheld device and will focus on makeovers and jewelry design.

Ubisoft's Imagine brand has sold more units than any other Ubisoft brand - 13 million copies worldwide since its launch in October 2007.

"These girls have buying power, and they're using it," Key said. Girl games accounted for \$150 million in sales for Ubisoft last year.

Electronic Arts is pursuing tween girls with its "Charm Girls Club," set for release in October. The publisher sees "Charm Girls Club" as a social game that girls can play when they get together at home.

It's being developed for Nintendo's market-leading Wii console with its motion-sensing controllers.

"It's designed to make the girls have an absolute ball at a sleepover party," Key said.

EA also is planning to take its "Littlest Pet Shop" franchise from the DS to the Wii and into PC online games.

The company hopes it can capture business from girl gamers as they move from "Littlest Pet Shop" to "Charm Girls Club" to perhaps "The Sims," he says.

The secret is out about the lucrative girl games market, so publishers are having to step up their efforts.

"A couple of years ago, you could have put anything out on the shelf and because this market was emerging, you could have gotten away with it," Lange said. "But like with any emerging category, the market is becoming more educated and starting to have a higher threshold for their quality demands."

One reason that game publishers like girl games is because they're cheaper and quicker to develop than male-oriented action games.

"It's a good margin business," Key said. "The games are not expensive to make. The money is actually spent on the marketing side."

By comparison, a title like Ubisoft's "Splinter Cell" or "Assassin's Creed" can take two or three years to create, with large teams of 100 or 200 software developers.

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The Latest in Computer Technology News  
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Network Shutdown Bill Faces Changes, Aide Says

A bill in the U.S. Senate that would allow President Barack Obama to shut down parts of the Internet during a cybersecurity crisis will likely be rewritten and needs input from private businesses, said a congressional staff member associated with the legislation.

The Cybersecurity Act of 2009, introduced in April by Senators Jay Rockefeller, a West Virginia Democrat, and Olympia Snowe, a Maine Republican, contains "imperfect" language, said Ellen Doneski, chief of staff for the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee.

The bill, among other things, allows the U.S. president to "declare a cybersecurity emergency and order the limitation or shutdown of Internet traffic to and from any compromised Federal Government or United States critical infrastructure information system or network." The sponsors of the bill are looking for input on that section and other parts of the bill, said Doneski, who works for Rockefeller, the committee chairman.

That section of the bill was an attempt to put into law who has the ultimate authority for protecting U.S. cyberinfrastructure, Doneski said Friday at a cybersecurity forum sponsored by Google and the Center for New American Security, a Washington, D.C., think tank. "We were trying to state the obvious: In an extreme cyberemergency or attack, the president ultimately has constitutional authority to protect the country," she said. "It really wasn't meant to go beyond that."

Other speakers at Friday's event said they welcomed new attention on cybersecurity by members of Congress and especially Obama. The president's speech in late May, accompanied by a cybersecurity policy review, was "game-changing," said Christopher Painter, cybersecurity director at the U.S. National Security Council.

Personal attention by Obama will drive cybersecurity changes in the U.S. government, Painter said.

"By far, the most important part of it was executive attention," added Philip Reitinger, deputy undersecretary for national protection and programs at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. "Nothing is more important for driving change in an organization ... than executive attention."

While the White House will get a cybersecurity director under Obama's plan, DHS will continue to have significant cybersecurity authority. The agency's cybersecurity goals include hiring more people with network security experience and developing a more comprehensive cybersecurity recovery plan, Reitinger said.

Reitinger and other speakers also talked about an oft-mentioned goal for cybersecurity: public/private partnerships. While Painter suggested that the term has lost its meaning, Reitinger said DHS and private companies need to better share information about attacks and vulnerabilities with each other.

Those partnerships need to be ongoing and sustained, not just come together to respond to an attack, said Liesyl Franz, vice president for information security and global public policy at TechAmerica, a tech trade group. Those partnerships need to be in place "so if something happens, there's an organic way to respond," she said.

#### Accused Spam Scammer Pleads Guilty in Detroit

A Michigan man described as one of the world's most prolific senders of spam e-mail has pleaded guilty to charges accusing him of defrauding people by manipulating Chinese stock prices.

Prosecutors say 64-year-old Alan Ralsky of West Bloomfield made \$3 million in summer 2005 by using an elaborate spam e-mail system to inflate the prices of Chinese stocks on U.S. exchanges.

He pleaded guilty Monday to conspiracy, fraud and money laundering in federal court in Detroit. Nine of the 11 people indicted last year in the case have pleaded guilty.

Ralsky faces a possible prison sentence of 3 1/2 years or less under his plea agreement.

U.S. Attorney Terrence Berg says Ralsky was at one time the world's most notorious illegal spammer.

#### HP Unveils Web-connected Printer

Hewlett Packard unveiled a printer on Monday with a built-in Web connection that allows printing directly from the Internet without a personal computer.

The HP Photosmart Premium with TouchSmart Web, described by HP as the first Web-connected home printer, will be available later this year and should cost around 399 dollars in the United States, the company said in a statement.

The inkjet printer features a touchscreen panel which enables users to connect and print directly from specific websites.

Among the sites offering the print application are the newspaper USA Today, Google Maps and Google Calendar, movie ticket service Fandango, Weathernews and Coupons.com, which offers store, restaurant and entertainment discounts.

The printer can also connect to a user's Snapfish account to view, print and upload photos, the Palo Alto, California-based HP said.

A company spokeswoman said HP planned to release a developers kit later this year which would allow other sites to offer the printing option.

"Users will be able to browse and view popular Web destinations and simply touch the app of their choice to launch a Web page where they can customize and print content on demand in an easy-to-read format," the HP



statement said.

"We are taking advantage of the digital content explosion to reinvent the category with an entirely new printing platform - powered by touch and empowered by the Web," said Vyomesh Joshi, an HP executive vice president.

"By giving people access to the content they want at the touch of a finger, the ability to customize their printing experience and create their own apps, and enabling easy 'one touch' wireless setup, we are driving a significant shift in how people will be printing in the future."

#### Mozilla Offers Firefox 3.5 Release Candidate

Mozilla has published a release candidate for the Firefox 3.5 browser that is downloadable from the Mozilla Web site, a company representative said on Monday.

The browser upgrade features improvements in performance, compatibility, and speed. A key feature is the TraceMonkey JavaScript engine, offering better performance and stability, Mozilla said. The general release is due at the end of this month, depending on whether any bugs are found in the release candidate.

Tools are offered in version 3.5 for controlling private data, including a Private Browsing Model. Support for HTML 5 and elements is featured, including native backing for Ogg Theora-encoded video and Vorbis-encoded video. Also supported are HTML 5 local storage, offline application storage, text, and SVG transforms. Location-aware browsing is included, as is native support for JSON.

The release candidate offered Monday actually is the second release candidate build, but it is the first one directly downloadable from the Mozilla site. The previous build was available to about 800,000 beta users late last week.

A preview release of Firefox 3.5 had been offered early this month.

#### Microsoft Says Vista Buyers To Get Free Windows 7

Microsoft Corp. said Thursday that prices for the Windows 7 computer operating system are largely in line with those for Vista, and that consumers who buy PCs before the new system goes on sale in October will get free upgrades.

To drum up demand among people who aren't in the market for a new PC, Microsoft also said it is taking limited pre-orders for Windows 7, selling some for as little as \$50.

Windows 7 is Microsoft's first new operating system in almost three years. With Vista, Microsoft made under-the-hood technical changes that left other software companies and device makers scrambling to make their products work with new computers. Many didn't work at Vista's January 2007 launch; people also complained the new system was sluggish.

Microsoft is promising a smoother launch for Windows 7, in part because it's not a radical departure from Vista.

People who have tested near-final versions say Windows 7 boots and runs faster and spends less time nagging the user with alerts and pop-up windows than Vista does. It also tries to make it easier for people to navigate to frequently used Web sites, documents and tasks.

For customers buying new machines, the cost of the Windows software is typically included in the purchase price. The prices announced Thursday are for people who buy Windows separately or upgrade from older versions.

Consumers who buy Windows Vista Home Premium, Business or Ultimate computers starting Friday can contact the PC manufacturer for a free upgrade when Windows 7 becomes available on Oct. 22. Windows Vista Home Basic is not eligible for upgrade. The offer will run through January 2010.

Microsoft will record only about half the revenue it receives from selling those copies of Windows Vista before Windows 7 launches. The rest, about \$200 million to \$300 million in sales, will be recognized in later quarters, once the upgrades have been distributed or the program ends, whichever comes first.

The Redmond, Wash.-based software maker said it will cost people \$120 to upgrade their existing machines to the Windows 7 Home Premium version, \$10 less than the comparable Windows Vista upgrade software. Upgrades to the Professional and Ultimate versions will cost \$200 and \$220 respectively, the same as Vista.

By comparison, Apple Inc. said in early June that upgrades to its newest operating system, called Mac OS X Snow Leopard, will cost \$30.

The cost is identical regardless of whether the upgraded machine was running Windows XP or Windows Vista.

Versions meant to be installed from scratch on a computer will cost \$200, \$300 and \$320 for Home Premium, Professional and Ultimate.

Home Premium includes the updated look and feel first introduced with Vista, a new system for home networking, the ability to create DVDs and other features. Professional, the next level up, adds features to support people who might have to work from home or use their computer for work on the road. Ultimate is an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink edition with added data security and other features more commonly requested by big businesses.

Microsoft is pushing those versions, but it makes three more: Starter, Home Basic and Enterprise. Starter doesn't include the updated look of Vista or Windows 7 and is only available pre-installed by PC makers on certain types of hardware, such as netbooks. Home Basic is only available in developing countries. Enterprise is sold through volume license agreements to big corporate customers.

Vista's weak reception has prompted Microsoft to extend the life of Windows XP, an older system that is less profitable for the software maker.

This time, to goose early sales and build buzz, Microsoft is cutting the

Windows 7 price by about half for people who pre-order upgrade software for Home Premium (\$50) and Professional (\$100).

The sale will start Friday in the U.S., Canada and Japan, and on July 15 in the U.K., France and Germany. It will last for about two weeks, or as long as allotted copies of the software last.

People can buy the software on Microsoft's download site or at retailers including Best Buy Co. Inc., which said it is limiting sales to three per customer.

Microsoft would not say how much it will cost to upgrade from a lesser version of Windows 7 to a more robust one. The company also declined to say what effect Windows 7 prices will have on netbooks, a popular category of small, inexpensive laptops. The low prices are possible in part because they run the older, cheaper Windows XP.

Microsoft said this month it is making a version of Windows for Europe that does not come with Internet Explorer, its Web browser, in an attempt to ward off sanctions from antitrust regulators there.

Brad Brooks, a corporate vice president for Windows marketing, said Microsoft hasn't had time to polish upgrade software for Europe, so it plans to sell the full version of Windows 7 to European Union consumers at upgrade prices at least through December.

#### Jackson, Fawcett Deaths Exploited for Web Scams

The cybersecurity arm of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) warned on Friday that Web scammers were seeking to take advantage of the deaths of Michael Jackson and Farah Fawcett.

US-CERT said it is "aware of public reports of an increased number of spam campaigns, phishing attacks, and malicious code targeting the recent deaths of Michael Jackson and Farrah Fawcett."

"Email messages may attempt to gain user information through phishing attacks or by recording email addresses if the user replies to the message," said US-CERT, the operational arm of DHS's National Cyber Security Division.

"Additionally, email messages may contain malicious code or may contain a link to a seemingly legitimate website containing malicious code," it said.

Phishing attacks are attempts by cyber criminals to collect user names and passwords through the use of realistic-looking replicas of Web pages, giving them access to legitimate user accounts.

US-CERT advised caution in opening unsolicited email and recommended that computer users be sure their antivirus software is up to date.

Who Moved My 'Delete' Key? Lenovo Did. Here's Why.

Lenovo put nearly a year of research into two design changes that debuted on an updated ThinkPad laptop this week. No, not the thinner, lighter form or the textured touchpad - rather, the extra-large "Delete" and "Escape" keys.

It may seem like a small change, but David Hill, vice president of corporate identity and design at Lenovo, points out, "Any time you start messing around with the keyboard, people get nervous."

Computers get smaller and faster every year, but keyboard design remains largely stuck in the 19th century. When Beijing-based Lenovo, which bought IBM Corp.'s personal-computer business in 2005, looked into improving the keyboard on the new ThinkPad T400s, a \$1,600-and-up laptop for businesspeople, it knew it had to proceed with caution.

To understand Lenovo's concern, turn the clock back to the 1800s.

Back then, fast typing would jam typewriters, so a keyboard layout that slowed down flying fingers was devised. The commonly used "A" key, for example, was banished to the spot under the relatively uncoordinated left pinky.

Typewriter technology evolved. Mainframe computing led to function keys and others of uncertain use today. The PC era dawned. Yet many laws of keyboard layout remain sacred, like the 19-millimeter distance between the centers of the letter keys.

Tom Hardy, who designed the original IBM PC of 1981, said companies have tried many times to change the sizes of keys. That first PC had a smaller "Shift" key than IBM's popular Selectric typewriter did, and it was placed in a different spot, in part because the industry didn't think computers would replace typewriters for high-volume typing tasks.

IBM reversed course with the next version to quiet the outcry from skilled touch-typists.

"Customers have responded with a resounding, 'Don't fool with the key unless you can improve it,'" said Hardy, now a design strategist based in Atlanta.

PC makers relearned this lesson in the past year, as netbooks - tiny, cheap laptops - have become popular with budget-conscious consumers. Early models boasted screens measuring as little as 7 inches on the diagonal, requiring shrunken keyboards that many people found to be too small. Some even repeated IBM's mistake by cutting the size of the "Shift" key.

The computer makers have largely shifted focus to 10-inch or larger netbooks, so that there'd be room for near-standard keyboards or better.

Push-back from consumers hasn't stopped companies from testing and even manufacturing keyboards with unconventional designs over the years, in some cases demonstrating that people could learn to type faster than on standard QWERTY keyboards, so-called because of the arrangement of the top row of letters. During Hardy's time at IBM, researchers came up with ball-shaped one-handed keyboards that he said were faster than standard ones.

"A lot of those things never passed the business planners and the bean counters because they were concerned about manufacturing something that

was just basically an experiment," Hardy said.

Ones that did get made have remained niche.

Paul Bradley, an executive creative director at the global design group Frog Design, said makers of ergonomic keyboards that also improved typing speed were counting on concern over carpal tunnel syndrome during the dot-com boom of the 1990s to drive demand, but the market never materialized.

If ever there were a time to make radical changes to the keyboard, now might be it. As evidence, Bradley noted the high tolerance many younger people show for tapping out cell-phone messages on tiny keypads using only their thumbs.

Lenovo is on a more conservative course. In designing the new ThinkPad, it installed keystroke-tracking software on about 30 employees' computers (They volunteered). On average, they used the "Escape" and "Delete" keys 700 times per week, yet those were the only "outboard" keys, or non-letter keys, that hadn't been enlarged.

Lenovo made those two keys about twice as long in the vertical direction to fit the way people reach up, rather than to the side, and then deliberately whack those keys, said Hill, the Lenovo executive who was at IBM for nearly 20 years before the 2005 sale to Lenovo. The new design cuts down on accidental taps of the "End" and "Insert" keys, too.

The new keyboard isn't perfect. Hill called "Caps Lock" a frustrating hangover from typewriter days, a key that can introduce garble, emulate shouting or foil password entries without the user noticing.

"I think maybe sometime in the future, we should maybe entertain removing it," he said. "It's one of those things you kind of have to approach with caution. There might be some people out there who just really like their 'Caps Lock' key for whatever reason."

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